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R E P O R T

OF THE

JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE

ON

BURIAL GROUNDS.



ROXBURY:

JOSEPH G. TORREY, PRINTER.

1856.

CITY OF ROXBURY.

IN BOARD OF ALDERMEN, JULY 28, 1856.

The Report and Order of the Joint Standing Committee on Burial Grounds, on the petition of John A. Winslow and others, relating to the condition of the Tombs in the Burial Ground at Mount Vernon Place, was read, laid upon the table, and ordered to be printed.

JOSEPH W. TUCKER, *City Clerk.*

CITY OF ROXBURY.

IN BOARD OF ALDERMEN, July 28, 1856.

The Joint Standing Committee on Burial Grounds, to whom was referred the petition of J. A. Winslow, F. A. Todd, John J. Soren, F. Curtis, and others, relating to the condition of the tombs in the Burial Ground at Mount Vernon Place, beg leave respectfully to

REPORT :

That they have taken the subject matter of the petition into full consideration ; have given a hearing to the petitioners, and have examined the condition of the Cemetery and the Tombs.

It appears, that in consequence of the action of the city government, no burials in the grave yard at Mount Vernon Place have taken place since the year 1849 ; and no new tombs have been built since that period. The number of tombs belonging to individuals is forty-one, the original cost of each,

averaging from two-hundred and fifty to three hundred dollars. Most of these tombs have been used, and are still liable to be used ; one or two have been abandoned ; but the proprietors of others, owing to deep-seated prejudices, an unwillingness to sacrifice so much property, or, it may be, to associations of a character honorable to human nature, are very reluctant to abandon their right to use them for the purpose of interment.

The interments in these private tombs are by no means frequent, probably not exceeding one in the course of a month, and from the manner in which they are constructed, the Committee cannot entertain the idea, that these tombs, belonging to individual proprietors, are injurious to health. Indeed, as they are so seldom opened, and as a general thing, decomposition from previous interments must cease long before new burials take place, it is believed that with proper care and precaution on the part of the proprietors, no inconvenience or annoyance from that source can occur ; and in the belief that public opinion must cause this odious custom of interments in the midst of populous communities to be abandoned in the course of a very few years, they do not recommend *now* the adoption of any stringent measures, with a view to hasten this result.

The Committee have ascertained, however, that in

order to accommodate the public, one or more Receiving Tombs, have been used in this Cemetery by the Superintendent of Burials, where bodies have been deposited, not merely a few days, or until reasonable time is given to prepare a proper burial place elsewhere, but for months, and in some cases, it may be, for years: and it is undoubtedly from the frequent opening of these Receiving Tombs, where there are almost at all times bodies in a state of decomposition, that arises the unpleasant effluvia and annoyance, of which the petitioners complain.

On the subject of burials in the midst of populous towns and cities, a great change has taken place in public opinion, within a few years. It is now generally admitted that this practice, so common for centuries in many countries, particularly in Great Britain, as well as the practice of interments in the vaults of churches, is not only in contravention to the recognised rules of propriety and good taste, but in some cases, by impregnating the atmosphere with poisonous effluvia, is greatly detrimental to health. And thus we find that those Cities of the Silent, located in pleasant spots remote from the noise and hum of the busy world, among the fields, the pastures or the forests, surrounded by the charms of nature, improved by the hand of art, are multiplying in the land: and in a few years, public opinion will undoubtedly be the means

of banishing burial places of every description from the midst of all thickly inhabited cities or towns, and breaking up a custom which had its origin in a barbarous era, and has no advantages to recommend it in a more progressive age.

The City of Roxbury, by an enlightened policy on the subject of burials, has done much towards giving a proper direction to the public mind. Interments in grounds belonging to the City, and formerly used for such purpose, have for years been forbidden by the City Council. Eligible lots in the Cemetery at Forest Hills are furnished at a reasonable price to all persons who wish to secure a beautiful and quiet resting place for the dead. A portion of these grounds is set apart for private burials, where any one may purchase a grave for the trifling sum of *nine dollars*, and reserve to himself the exclusive right of proprietorship; and if unable or unwilling to secure this right, he is permitted to deposit the body of a friend or relative in the bosom of its mother, earth, by paying the small sum (two dollars) fixed upon by the Commissioners for the opening of the grave.

While such facilities for burials at Forest Hills are furnished by the City Government, it can hardly be supposed that any one, unless under very peculiar circumstances, can long continue as a place for sepulture, an unsightly brick tomb, in the centre of a populous

district. And the route to Forest Hills being always unobstructed, in winter, as well as in summer, there can hardly occur a case where an individual, however poor or humble, cannot with but little trouble, without delay, and almost without expense if he chooses, procure at Forest Hills, a last resting place for the remains of a deceased member of his family.

Under these circumstances, taken in connection with the fact, that there is a large Receiving Tomb at Forest Hills, the Committee would recommend the adoption of the accompanying order, by the Board of Health, (as authorised by section 5, in chapter 257, of the Acts and Resolves of 1855,) forbidding the use or establishment of any Receiving Tomb within the bounds of the City.

The Committee feel unwilling to take leave of this subject, without expressing a hope that the *convenience* of the proprietors of Tombs in the old Burial Grounds, as well as a desire on their part to conform to the wishes of a large portion of their fellow citizens, and the improved usages of society, will induce them soon to abandon their tombs for eligible burial lots at Forest Hills.

JOHN S. SLEEPER, *Chairman.*

City of Roxbury.

IN BOARD OF ALDERMEN, July 28, 1856.

ORDERED, By the Board of Health of the City of Roxbury, that no Receiving Tombs, that is, "Tombs used by undertakers as places of deposit for bodies committed to them for burial, for the purpose of speculation," shall henceforth be permitted to be used in the City of Roxbury ; and the Mayor is hereby authorized to cause the Superintendent of Burials to remove the contents of any Receiving Tombs now existing, and which have been accumulating within the past few years.

Read, laid upon the table and ordered to be printed.

JOSEPH W. TUCKER, *City Clerk*.
